

## *Introduction*

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MORE AMERICANS ARE searching for their ancestors than ever before in our nation's history. This can be attributed to a number of reasons: the recent celebration of the country's Bicentennial; the publication of Alex Haley's novel *Roots* and its subsequent television series which had one of the highest Nielson ratings in American television history; the increasing number of retirees, and others of all ages, with more leisure to enable them to engage in this pursuit; and the encouragement of pride in one's ethnic origin. Whatever the impetus to begin the search, genealogy is now outranked in popularity as a hobby in the United States only by stamp and coin collecting.<sup>1</sup>

Robert M. Warner, Archivist of the United States, stated that research use of National Archives records has been increasing dramatically—a growth of about 79 percent in only the past five years. Much of this increase has resulted from interest in family studies: approximately 75 percent of the 50,000 researcher cards issued and 90 percent of the 310,000 written requests the National Archives responded to in 1980 related to genealogical research. These figures reflect activity at the Washington, D.C., facilities and in the eleven Regional Archives Branches. Significant increases in reference activity have been occurring in the interlibrary loan of microfilm copies of archival records.<sup>2</sup>

The American Library Association recognizes the general interest in the subject of genealogy and the need to educate librarians in serving genealogists and family researchers. The Reference and Adult Services

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Division-History Section (RASD-HS) has had an active genealogy committee for years and a newly formed genealogy discussion group will be meeting at the midwinter conference in Washington in January 1984. RASD-HS offered a preconference entitled "Genealogy and Local History Reference Services" before the San Francisco annual meeting in June 1981. A special program was offered at the Philadelphia annual meeting in July 1982 to assist librarians serving genealogists, and additional training sessions or workshops are being considered by the Genealogy Committee for future conferences. To meet the growing needs of its members throughout the entire country, the National Genealogical Society has scheduled its recent annual meetings outside the District of Columbia for the first time: Atlanta in 1981, Indianapolis in 1982, and Fort Worth in 1983. These and future meetings in San Francisco and Salt Lake City are being arranged through close cooperation with the state and local genealogical societies and the public libraries.

This growing interest in family history is effecting a broad change in the attitude of librarians and archivists toward the genealogist and genealogical research. In the past the usual library attitude has not supported service to genealogists with the result that professional assistance to them has for the most part been minimal. Now many libraries that had not bought genealogical material are taking closer looks at their acquisitions policies and are beginning to select publications of genealogical societies, associations and governmental bodies, although still generally excluding individual family histories except when adequately indexed.

While reference librarians are becoming more willing to help this type of patron, many of them are unaware of the research tools currently available. New editions of "how-to" books are continually being published, and although they provide some guidance, they do not present an overall view of the subject. It is hoped, therefore, that this issue of *Library Trends* will offer librarians a valuable, up-to-date portrayal of the subject so that the competence of librarians to meet the research needs of their genealogist patrons will be developed. These articles are meant to inform librarians of what is happening today in genealogy, how genealogical collections are built, the specialized collections in some public libraries and the Library of Congress, the resources of the genealogical society, and the services available to the public through national and state archives and historical society libraries. The Library of the LDS (Latter-day Saints) Church houses the world's foremost collection of genealogical materials, and its facilities and policies are

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described so that a librarian can become familiar with what is offered in order to make worthwhile referrals. Some overlooked materials forming part of a large academic research collection are noted as examples of what can be found in other such libraries. Blacks have special requirements in tracing their family histories, and an overview of such research is provided in another article.

It is anticipated that this issue will help librarians understand the fervor of genealogists and might generate an attitude of real assistance to them instead of the more common feeling of such researchers being second-class citizens. Perhaps, through the reading of these articles, the reference librarians will view genealogists as "unique" patrons rather than "problem" patrons.

## **References**

1. Bidlack, Russell E. "Genealogy as It Relates to Library Service." In *The ALA Yearbook: A Review of Library Events 1977*, edited by Robert Wedgeworth, pp. xxiii-xxx. Chicago: ALA, 1978.
2. Robert M. Warner, Archivist of the United States, personal communication, 26 March 1981.

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